Mask Buying Guide

By Mask Bloc Seattle
If you find any dead links in this guide, please reach out to us and let us know
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Introduction

Now that the government has abandoned public health measures, we are left as individuals to figure out how to protect ourselves from COVID-19. This can be a very daunting task, but Mask Bloc Seattle is here to help! Masking is the most important thing you can do to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your neighbors.

Buying masks can be very challenging for individuals. Wading through the countless types and shapes of masks to figure out what to buy is difficult. People buying masks also need to be cautious of counterfeit K/N95s, which are unfortunately common. In this guide we hope to simplify the process and provide links to trusted sites.

We also know that the price of masks can be prohibitive for many people. If you are unable to get masks from Mask Bloc Seattle through our request form or just want to buy your own, these links can help you out. We have prioritized affordable options as much as possible in our recommendations while still recommending trusted, authenticated sources.

If any of the abbreviations or terminology in this guide are unclear, check our Glossary at the end of this document. For information about masks, how they work, and how to wear them, check out our Information/FAQ section.

None of the links in this document are affiliate links and we make no money off of any mask purchases. Masks are listed alphabetically by brand, (*) next to most affordable options.

Adult Mask Recommendations

N95 masks

3M Aura 9205

One size, tri-fold/boat shape, white. This mask fits a wide range of face sizes and shapes.
Stauffer Safety, Industrial Safety Products, Enviro Safety, Home Depot, Office Depot
We DO NOT recommend buying this mask model on Amazon. Many sellers on that site sell counterfeit 3M respirators.

3M Aura 9210+

One size, tri-fold/boat shape, white. This mask has straps that are tighter and more durable than the Aura 9205. This can help the mask fit people with smaller heads better than the Aura 9205.
Stauffer Safety, Industrial Safety Products, Enviro Safety, Zoro
We DO NOT recommend buying this mask model on Amazon. Many sellers on that site sell counterfeit 3M respirators.

3M V-flex

Regular and small sizes, duckbill shape, white. The regular size mask is a good option for larger heads/faces. These masks are sold in 50 packs at a minimum.
Regular/large: Industrial Safety Products, Zoro, Digikey
Small: Zoro, Digikey

ACI N95 Surgical*

One size, duckbill shape, light blue. This mask is a good option for smaller heads/faces. Nose wire is located outside of the mask.
Armbrust

Blox Surgical Respirator*

One size, duckbill shape, white. This mask provider offers frequent sales and is an affordable option. This mask is a good option for smaller heads/faces.
Blox

BNX N95

One size, tri-fold/boat shape with head strap. Comes in white and black. Fits similarly to the Aura 9205.
Amazon (verified seller)

BYD N95*

One size, bi-fold/beak shape with head strap, teal. One of the more affordable options.
Office Depot

Dräger X-plore 1950 N95

Two sizes: small or medium/large. Tri-fold/boat shape, white. This mask runs large and most people should wear a small. This is not a good option for people with smaller heads/faces.
Amazon (verified seller)

Gerson 3230

One size, duckbill shape
Sturdier straps than Halyard/Kimberly-Clark duckbill, so slightly more reusability. The 3230 is not fluid resistant, unlike the 3230+, so it's slightly more breathable.
SafeWare Inc, Armburst

Kimberly-Clark/Halyard/Kimtech

One size, duckbill shape.
These are the same mask model sold under different names. Those in white are not fluid resistant and are slightly more breathable as a result.These masks are only good for one use. The straps resemble flimsy wrinkly crepe paper (but elastic) and due to lack of durability they will stretch out quickly.

The orange masks are fluid resistant and are slightly less breathable but have sturdier straps that are good for reuse.
W B Mason, JonDon, Safety Co

Moldex 2200

One size, cup shape. Comes in white.
PK Safety

Readimask

Offers sizes small, large, x-large. Comes in yellow or gray. This mask has no nose wire and no straps at all; it is worn using an adhesive. This is a great option for cases where you need a mask with no straps, no nose wire, or no metal. This mask is approved for use in MRIs and other medical scans. Alliant Biotech offers a size kit for $5.
Readimask Website, Alliant Biotech

KN95/KF94 masks

Armbrust KN95

Adult and childrens size, Bi-fold shape with earloops, comes in a variety of colors including black, gray, pink, purple. Made in the US, but one of the more expensive options.
Armbrust

Bluna Facefit KF94

Tri-fold/boat shape with adjustable earloops. Offers one adult and one kids size. Comes in white and black.
KollecteUSA

BNX KN95

Offers sizes kids small, adult medium, and adult large (adult sizes run large compared to other KN95 brands). Bi-fold shape with earloops, comes in a variety of colors, including black, white, lavender, and teal.
Amazon (verified seller)

BreatheTeq KN95

Tri-fold/boat shape with earloops.
Offers sizes kids extra small, adult small, adult medium, and adult large. Comes in black, gray, and lavender purple. Also offers a 4 piece sample size kit for 7 dollars.
BreatheTeq

BYD KN95*

One size, bi-fold shape with earloops. Comes in white. One of the more affordable options.
Planet Halo Health

Cleanwell KF94

One size, tri-fold/boat shape, adjustable earloops. Comes in burgundy, forest green, navy blue, and beige.
Planet Halo Health

Evergreen Clean top KF94

Tri-fold/boat shape with adjustable earloops. Offers one adult and one kids size. The adult size is a good option for larger heads/faces. Comes in white and black.
Kollecte

Good Day Happy Life KF94

One size, tri-fold/boat shape with earloops. Comes in white and black.
Planet Halo Health, Kollecte

Harley KN95

One size, tri-fold/boat shape with earloops. Comes in white and black.
Bonafide Masks

Kind KN95/KF94

One size with earloops. Tri-fold/boat shape comes in 30 different colors, bi-fold/beak shape comes in 15 colors. One of the more expensive options.
KF94 (tri-fold): PPE Supply Canada
KN95 (bi-fold): PPE Supply Canada

Kingfa KN95

One size with earloops. Bi-fold shape. Comes in a variety of colors, including black and pink.
Planet Halo Health

MaskLab KF94

One size, tri-fold/boat shape with earloops. Comes in a variety of colors & designs. One of the more expensive options.
MaskLab US, MaskLab Global

Powecom KN95

Offers size small and regular. Bi-fold shaped mask that has different models for earloops or head straps. Comes in multiple colors, including black and pink.
Bona Fide Masks

Savewo Family Masks KN95

A variety of 14 size categories total, including 7 children sizes for kids as young as 6 months up to teens. Earloop bi-fold and tri-fold/boat shaped masks.
Many colors and prints, as well as animal shaped bi-fold masks.
A 4 piece sample size pack is available for 5 dollars plus shipping.
SaveWo/Family Masks Website

Wellbefore KN95/KF94

Offers sizes: small, large, x-large. This manufacturer offers bi-fold and tri-fold/boat shaped masks. Masks come in multiple colors including black. Some mask models have adjustable earloops or nose foam to provide a better fit.
KF94 (tri-fold): Wellbefore
KN95 (bi-fold): Wellbefore

Childrens Mask Recommendations

Be aware: there are no official N95 masks for children. Currently NIOSH only approves adult masks. Any company claiming to sell an N95 mask for children is misrepresenting their product.

Armbrust KN95

One size that fits older children and petite adults. Bi-fold shaped mask with earloops. Comes in a variety of colors including black, blue, pink, and purple. Made in the US, but one of the more expensive options.
Armbrust

Bluna KF94

One size for ages 5-9.Tri-fold/boat shape with adjustable earloops. Comes in white.
Kollecte

BreatheTeq KN95

Tri-fold/boat shape with earloops.
Offers sizes kids extra small (as well as an adult small, medium, and large). Comes in black, gray, and lavender purple. Also offer a 4 piece sample size kit for 7 dollars.
BreatheTeq

Good Day Happy Life KF94

Kids size (recommended ages 2-5) and youth size (recommended ages 5-12). Tri-fold/boat shaped mask with earloops. Comes in black or white.
Kids: Planet Halo Health
Youth: Planet Halo Health, Kollecte

Harley KN95

Smaller sized for children or adults with small faces. Tri-fold/boat shape for earloops. Comes in white.
Bonafide Masks

Powecom KN95

One size for age 4+. Bi-fold shaped mask with earloops. Comes in multiple colors, including black and pink.
Bona Fide Masks

Product Lab KF94

Kids size (recommended ages 6-9) and youth size (age 9+ to small adult). Tri-fold/boat shaped mask with earloops. Comes in yellow, pink, beige, and grey.
Kids: Planet Halo Health, Kollecte
Youth: Planet Halo Health

Savewo Family Masks KN95

A variety of 14 size categories total, including 7 children sizes for kids as young as 6 months up to teens. Earloop bi-fold and tri-fold/boat shaped masks.
Many colors and prints, as well as animal shaped bi-fold masks.
A 4 piece sample size pack is available for 5 dollars plus shipping.
SaveWo/Family Masks

Wellbefore KN95/KF94

Offers sizes: x-small (ages 2-4), small (ages 5-8), regular (ages 9-12). This manufacturer offers bi-fold and tri-fold/boat shaped masks. Masks come in multiple colors including black. Some mask models have adjustable earloops to provide a better fit.
KN95 (bi-fold): Wellbefore
KF94 (tri-fold/boat): Wellbefore

Reusable/Elastomeric Masks

@lolagerms has created a comprehensive elastomeric mask guide.

As Lola writes, “"Elastomeric" refers to the squishy flexible part that seals against your face, which is usually made of silicone, or sometimes TPE. Masks like these have replaceable filters that you change out, instead of tossing the whole mask.”

Check out their guide for FAQs and specific mask recommendations!

Rapid tests

Flowflex:
https://store.weshielddirect.com/products/flowflex-covid-19-antigen-home-test-1-test?variant=40883704398010

https://store.pharmalynk.com/products/flowflex-covid-19-antigen-rapid-home-test-kit-flash-sale?_pos=1&_psq=flowfle&_ss=e&_v=1.0

https://www.ppe-supply.com/products/flowflex-covid-19-antigen-rapid-test

iHealth:
https://store.weshielddirect.com/products/copy-of-ihealth%C2%AE-covid-19-antigen-rapid-test-box-of-40-tests

https://store.pharmalynk.com/products/ihealth-covid-19-antigen-rapid-test-1box-has-2-tests

Binax:
https://store.weshielddirect.com/products/abbott-binaxnow-covid-19-ag-card-test-2-pack

Information/FAQ

What masks are protective against COVID?

Masks protect us most effectively from COVID when they are made from a high filtration material and when they fit snug to the face with no leaks. Some masks are not very protective against COVID because they are loose fitting (surgical masks) or are not made of materials that filter out virus aerosols (cloth masks).

The masks recommended in this document provide very good protection against COVID because they effectively filter virus aerosols. These masks are made from electrostatic material (N95, KN95, KF94) that attracts and captures virus aerosols. For these masks to best protect you, they should fit your face well so that all the air you breathe is filtered through the mask. You may need to try several masks before you find one that is comfortable and fits your face well with no leaks.

Here is a short video about how electrostatic material can filter out very small particles: https://youtu.be/eAdanPfQdCA

Introduction to Mask Shapes & Types

Tri-fold/boat/fish

A shape for N95 or KF94 masks. This mask comes folded flat

Bi-fold/beak

A shape for KN95 masks. This mask comes folded flat and has a “spine” down the center. When putting on one of these masks for the first time it is important to completely open the mask and flatten the nose wire before molding it to the shape of your nose. See here for a guide.

Cup/dome

A shape for N95 masks. This mask is the typical N95 shape that you will find at hardware stores. This mask cannot fold flat.

Duckbill

A shape for N95 masks. This mask comes folded flat.

How can I tell if my mask fits well?

There are various different levels of confidence in establishing a well fitting mask. The most accessible are positive pressure (exhale) or negative pressure (inhale) seal checks, but there are also qualitative and quantitative fit tests.

Seal Checks

A quick seal check should be done each time you put on a mask. Lightly hold the mask in place and inhale (or exhale) sharply. While inhaling (or exhaling), pay attention to see if you feel a sensation of air or coolness around the edge of the mask. Pay particular attention to the area around the nose. If you feel air leaking, adjust the mask and try again. After adjusting, if the mask is still leaking, try a different model. (Source 1, Source 2)

Qualitative Fit Tests

If you really want to ensure a good seal on your mask, you can try qualitative or quantitative mask fit testing. Qualitative fit testing relies on your sense of taste to tell you if one mask or another mask fits you better, essentially it involves misting a solution with specific chemicals and seeing if/how much you taste it while wearing your mask. You can compare masks by their effectiveness very easily using this method and this is what most workplaces use for fit testing their workers if they require masks for shifts.

A DIY qualitative fit test is an easy and fairly cheap way to be fully certain that the high filtration mask you've chosen fits YOUR face well enough to make a leak free seal. Here's a YouTube tutorial about them. You can also find two written guides here and here, Sweet N Low (sodium saccharin) and any small directional aerosolizer (portable fan mister, eyelash mister, portable nebulizer, etc) can be used for a DIY fit test.

You can also purchase official qualitative fit test kits in many places, including here.

Quantitative Fit Tests

Quantitative fit testing involves using a machine to test the air inside the mask and compare it to the air outside the mask. This gives you a "fit factor" as a number, which can be compared to national guidelines and other masks you have tested. A fit factor of at least 100 is required in workplaces by OSHA. You might be able to find some locations to give you access to a machine, or they can be rented or occasionally can be bought second hand on ebay.

Can I use my mask multiple times safely?

Masks do not quickly lose their ability to filter virus aerosols, but over multiple uses the straps can loosen or the mask can become misshapen.

Aaron Collins
@masknerd

Most people are surprised that N95/KN95/KF94 can be used more than 8 hrs. Actually the N95 spec requires that these masks maintain >95% after 200mg of loading. How much is 200mg, same as wearing the mask 24/7 in Shanghai for about 200 DAYS! Straps will be the first thing to fail

Loose straps can worsen the seal of the mask around your face, making the mask less protective. When reusing masks, pay close attention to how loose the ear loops or head straps are and carefully check for leaks by doing a seal check.

Different masks have different types and qualities of elastic straps, meaning some masks can't be reused at all and some can be reused many many times. In general, 5 uses is a safe bet. But whenever in doubt, throw it out.

Viral particle transfer to skin has been proven to be unlikely in this study (Link 2). No infective covid was able to be transferred to hands by touch, and, more generally, virus transfer from any surface at all is very unlikely to result in infection. We have found no evidence that masks require disinfection between uses in regards to covid, but it is worth noting that the study we have linked above does not include testing for other viruses. Many people, aiming to be extra cautious, allow extra time for viruses to die off by leaving their used masks in a breathable paper bag for 1-3 days.

You may also like to see our instagram post on mask reuse here!

How to properly put on/take off masks to optimize fit and reusability

How to put on a bi-fold mask:
https://medium.com/@sharynblum/how-to-properly-form-a-vertical-bifold-mask-14a4168781cf

How to don/doff (put on/take off) masks:
https://twitter.com/sleepyknave/status/1474449595518394374

There is a mask I want to buy that isn't in this document. How do I know if the mask is safe?

This guide is not comprehensive and there are effective masks that are not linked here.

All NIOSH certified masks have been tested and approved by NIOSH, which is a part of the CDC a national public health agency in the US.

The US mask manufacturer Armbrust does independent filter efficiency testing of many N95, KN95, and KF94 masks. They have not tested every mask on the market, but do have a comprehensive database. You can search for the brand/model here.

Accumed, a US based biotech company, also has a mask filtration testing database which can be found here.

@MaskNerd Aaron Collins (database here, YouTube channel here) and @FitTestMyPlanet (database here and here) are private individuals who have databases of masks they've tested with quantitative fit test machines.

Fit testing databases might not help you specifically if you don't have a similar face shape to the person compiling the data, but if they include information on testing the filter material specifically (and many do) you can find out if that mask is reliable on paper *IF* it fits your face.

The earloops on my mask are too big. Is there a way to make them smaller?

Hooks and other adjustable options that attach to the earloops and go behind the head can help tighten your mask:
Plastic hook
Adjustable mask lanyard
Adjustable velcro

Some masks come with adjustable earloops, but you can also add cord locks to any mask's earloops in order to tighten them:
Black and white cord locks
Black cord locks
Colorful cord locks

I can feel air leaking into/out of my mask, but readjusting it doesn't fix the problem. Is there a way to make my mask fit better?

If there are leaks around the edges of your mask, you can use double-sided skin-safe tape to adhere the mask to your face. These are links to options for medical-grade tape:
Pre-cut strips for the nose bridge of masks
Full roll of adhesive that can be cut to size

Adding nose foam to you mask can also help with the seal:
Adhesive Nose Foam Pads

If using tape does not fix the problem, consider trying a different mask shape or size.

I have a small/large head. What mask would fit me best?

The Masks4All subreddit is a great resource for finding masks that will best fit your specific face. In their wiki they list mask recommendations for small and large heads. All masks listed in their wiki are hi-fi, reliable masks.

Aaron Collins (Mask Nerd) makes videos where he reviews masks and goes over best ones for different ages, face sizes, etc.

Which masks are the easiest to breathe in?

Masks with a large surface area are usually the most breathable. Duckbill masks like the ones mentioned in the N95 section have a very large surface area and are great for wearing during hot weather or exercise.

The US mask manufacturer Armbrust does independent filter efficiency testing of many N95, KN95, and KF94 masks. As a part of their testing, they measure the breathability of masks using a “pa” number. A lower number means the mask is more breathable. As an example many KN95s are around 150 pa, but the 3M Vflex (a duckbill mask) is 40 pa. You can search for the brand/model of masks in their database here.

Some elastomeric masks also have incredibly high breathability, like the Flo Mask or the Elastomask Pro.

Is there a way to safely drink without taking off my mask?

SipValve allows you to drink with a straw without removing your mask. It grips around a straw and automatically seals after each sip.

Independent testing has found that SipValve does not significantly impact the fit or filtration of masks.

How do I stop my glasses from fogging up when I wear a mask?

Improving the seal around the nose of your mask can reduce fogging. For that reason wearing masks with nose wire and nose foam or using mask tape can be helpful. Having a good seal near your nose may not totally prevent glasses fogging because warmer exhalations will still go out through the filter material of the mask. Using anti-fog wipes on your glasses can help this issue.

I only have access to surgical masks. Is there a way to make them more protective?

Surgical masks are made of good filtration material, but do not provide reliable protection from covid because they are baggy and fit poorly on most people. You can improve the fit and seal of a surgical mask by using a mask brace like this one:
https://www.fixthemask.com/products/2-pack

If you cannot get a mask brace, a cloth mask over your surgical mask will improve fit as well. This won't give you as good of a fit or as much protection as an N95, but it's better than wearing just a surgical mask.

Notably, a mask brace can be used over some N95 mask shapes in the same way, but a surgical or cloth mask should not be used over an N95 as it will reduce the effectiveness of the seal and make the mask less breathable.

You also may live near a mask bloc who can help you find a higher quality mask for free:
Mask Bloc Directory
COVID Action Map

Glossary

Breathability - How easy it is to breathe in a mask. People who review masks check this by measuring the airflow resistance.

Earloop - Straps used to wear a mask. These are worn around each ear.

Elastomeric - A mask with a reusable face piece and replaceable filters. These masks can be found at hardware stores and are sometimes used for DIY. There are lower profile options as well like the Flo Mask or Envo Mask.

Fluid Resistant - These masks provide protection against large droplets, splashes, or sprays of bodily or other hazardous fluids. This is helpful for healthcare settings, but is less relevant for

protecting against airborne pathogens or pollutants.

Head strap - Straps used to wear a mask. These are worn around the back of the neck and around the crown of the head.

Hi-fi - A slang term for protective masks. This is a shortening of “high filtration”.

KF94 - This is a Korean general public standard with high filtration material similar to N95 but will have earloops instead of headbands.The Korean mask industry is known for high quality and strict oversight, so when purchased through reliable distribution channels, there is little chance of getting counterfeits (as has been verified by mask testers). Source

KN95 - This is a Chinese standard which specifies high filtration in some ways similar to N95. Most typical styles use ear loops and are bifold type. Use caution in purchasing because there is a higher chance of counterfeits/fakes due to little oversight in the Chinese mask industry. Source

Nose foam - Foam padding on the inside nose bridge of a mask. This foam molds to the shape of your nose to prevent any leaks and to improve comfort.

Nose wire - A metal or plastic piece on the nose bridge of a mask. This is meant to be bent to the shape of your nose to provide a close fit and a good seal.

N95 - This is a US respiratory protection standard. Mask certification is provided by NIOSH (The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health).
N stands for Non-Oil, it does not filter oily particles. (R-Resistant for 8 hours and P-Oil Proof are other letters you could see)
95 means this mask is guaranteed to provide at least 95% particle filtration efficiency at the most difficult to filter size of microns. (Due to how the electrostatic filtration material works, particles larger AND smaller than .3 microns are easier to trap)

Respirator - The technical term for high filtration masks. This includes N95, KN95, and KF94 masks, as well as even more protective options like P100, N99, etc.)

Virus aerosols - Microscopic water droplets in the air that carry COVID virus. Infectious people emit these as they breathe, talk, sing, etc. This is the main way that COVID spreads - through the air that we breathe.